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Viewing cable 08ATHENS1294, SCENESETTER FOR GENERAL GRAPSAS' VISIT TO D.C.

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08ATHENS1294	2008-09-11 14:27	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Athens

Appears in these articles:

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VZCZCXRO0732
OO RUEHAG RUEHROV
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ATHENS 001294

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/10/2018

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR GENERAL GRAPSAS' VISIT TO D.C.
SEPTEMBER 15-19

Classified By: AMB DANIEL SPECKHARD. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

11. (C) The visit of General Demetrius Grapsas, Chief of the Hellenic National Defense General Staff, to Washington is an important opportunity to recognize Greece's support of multiple U.S. Navy and Air Force operations in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, including Iraq through overflights and transmissions through Souda Bay, as well as its ongoing contributions to Afghanistan and Kosovo. A pragmatic and apolitical officer, Grapsas will be receptive to our suggestions of ways Greece can further contribute. He is keenly interested in maintaining strong U.S.-Greek mil-to-mil relations as we continue to have differences with the GOG over Macedonia and a "business as usual" approach to Russia. Greece is a key buyer of U.S. military equipment, though recent procurement decisions tend to be based on political and seek a balance with the U.S., the EU, and Russia. END SUMMARY.

12. (S) U.S.-Greece defense cooperation has a long history rooted in the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine. Currently, some of Greece's key current contributions in the military sphere include:

-- Souda Bay: Souda Bay is the U.S. Navy's most important strategic location in the Eastern Mediterranean. A large number of U.S. and NATO operations in the Middle East and the Mediterranean depend on this facility in Crete. The Greeks do not place any restrictions on access, overflight, or deployment of even the most sensitive military assets at Souda Bay.

-- Flight Clearances/OEF and OIF Support: Since 9/11, the Greek Ministry of Defense granted blanket overflight clearances for all U.S. military aircraft that pass through Greek airspace in support of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

--KFOR: Greek military forces are important contributors to maintaining stability in Kosovo with approximately 600 personnel deployed in NATO's KFOR mission.

--OAE: Greece is one of the top three contributors to Operation Active Endeavor (OAE) - NATO's Article V counter-terrorist operation in the Mediterranean.

--Ship visits: The GOG has supported fully a robust ship-visit program allowing close to 300 U.S. naval vessels to visit 12 Greek ports over the last two years.

13. (S/NF) General Grapsas is open, but a staunch defender of Greece's interests. He is positively disposed towards the U.S., and he has pressed the Greek military to emulate American planning, transformation, training, and procurement. He is suspicious of Russia and resisted efforts to procure Russian defense articles. He told the U.S. Defense Attach that he regrets Greece's recent purchase of Russian BMP-3's. Similarly, he has said he would support providing Greek forces for Iraq and increase Greek forces in Afghanistan, to include lifting the regional caveat restricting Greek personnel to the Kabul region. However, General Grapsas has little influence on defense policy and procurement decisions. The Greek constitution places strong restrictions on the role of military officers in participating in policy development.

14. (SBU) Greece has had plenty of high-level NATO visits. Recently, General Craddock (20-22 July), Admiral Fitzgerald (2-3 April), Lt Gen McFann (2 July), and LTG Eikenberry (3 July) visited Athens and met with Grapsas. Although the discussions have been frank, all four visits were cordial resulting in agreement to continue cooperative dialogue on NATO issues. Additionally, the Joint Staff Talks and the U.S./Greece High Level Consultative Committee (HLCC) will meet in D.C. October 22 and October 24.

¶5. (C) Although the broader U.S./Greece relationship is not always smooth, the U.S.-Greece military-to-military relationship is strong, and we believe it pays important strategic dividends to the national security of the United

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States. We can advance our security agenda with Greece through General Grapsas' visit and upcoming bilateral mil-to-mil contacts.

Key Issues

¶6. (C) Among the key issues likely to come up are the following:

-- Macedonia: At the April NATO Summit, Greece blocked the invitation of Macedonia into the Alliance -- a top U.S. priority because of a lack of agreement on changing the country's name. We continue to urge both Athens and Skopje to work rapidly for a solution. Greek/Macedonian relations have been soured by a recent tart exchange of letters between Macedonian PM Gruevski and Greek PM Karamanlis on questions related to the "Macedonian minority" in Greece. Ultimately Athens is insisting on a solution that would:

-- indicate that "Macedonia" is a broader region than the country in question (hence Greece's support for a geographic qualifier such as "Northern" or "Upper" before Macedonia), and

-- be used broadly for all international use.

-- Greece-Turkey: The Greek/Turkish bilateral relationship has improved in recent years. The GOG remains supportive of Turkey's EU accession. There has, however, been no tangible progress on long-standing disputes over continental shelf and the status of islands in the Aegean. The Greeks are pleased with the momentum on Cyprus, sending positive signals about the September 3 start of UN-brokered talks, but strongly question Ankara's commitment to -- and potential to spoil -- progress on reaching a negotiated solution on Cyprus.

-- Aegean Exercises: The Greeks were deeply disappointed by the NATO decision not to support NOBLE ARCHER 2008. General Grapsas will want to discuss how NATO might craft an exercise in the future that would overfly Agios Efstratios, an island whose status as "demilitarized" is disputed between Greece and Turkey. General Grapsas feels that NATO's invocation of "neutrality" -- which results in a decision not/not to overfly any area under dispute -- always favors Turkish interests. The Greeks argue that the Turkish claim that Agios Efstratios is demilitarized is specious and not a valid justification for excluding the island from NATO exercises. Unlike many of his predecessors, General Grapsas has not gone to the press.

-- Russia/Georgia: PM Karamanlis has expanded Greece's relationship with Russia. This is in no small measure due to historical and religious ties and strong domestic political support for strengthening relations. The Russia/Georgia crisis is a challenge for Greece. The GOG supports Sarkozy's efforts, and FM Bakoyannis has said the right things on Georgian territory integrity and the withdrawal of Russian troops. PM Karamanlis has also publicly stated that violence is not the appropriate response and has emphasized "territorial integrity." Greece has pledged two monitors for the initial OSCE mission in Georgia and already pledged or delivered well over 469,500 Euros worth of in-kind and financial humanitarian assistance to Georgia.

At the same time, Greece has pursued "business as usual" with Russia, with meetings with Russian defense industry officials and Parliamentary ratification in September of the Southstream gas pipeline agreement. The Embassy has pushed the GOG hard to cancel or delay these ill-advised moves. Grapsas' visit will provide another opportunity to pass the

message to the Karamanlis government that they need to actively support Georgia and avoid business as usual with Russia.

-- Kosovo: Greece does not appear likely to recognize Kosovo in the immediate future, but is playing a reasonably constructive role behind the scenes. Beyond its over 600 forces in KFOR, the Greeks are providing personnel to the EU Rule of Law Mission (EULEX), the OSCE Mission, and the International Civilian Office (ICO) in Kosovo. It has also been among the most active players in the EU in engaging with Serbia post-Kosovo independence and in encouraging Serbia's European and Euro-Atlantic perspective.

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SPECKHARD